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SUBJECT: CHINA AND INDIA DISPUTE BHUTAN BORDER: INDIAN SOLDIERS MOVE
FROM KASHMIR TO WEST BENGAL

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Against the backdrop of efforts to improve bilateral relations, India and China continue to jostle over territory along India's northeast border with China. On December 12, India relocated 6,000 soldiers of the 27th Mountain Division (units of the 164 Mountain Brigade) from Jammu and Kashmir back to the unit's headquarters in Kalimpong, West Bengal. The media reported the deployment was a response to China's latest move into the Dolam Plateau in Bhutan. However, some post contacts believed that the move was more related to the reduced tensions in Kashmir allowing for troops to be shifted back to West Bengal. ConGen spoke with Kolkata-based Chinese Consul General Siwei Mao, who said that he believed that the Chinese forces have moved into Bhutan but that the border is not well demarcated and from the Chinese perspective it was not an intrusion. Mao also lamented the lack of Chinese diplomatic relations with Bhutan. The deployment of additional troops to West Bengal is not an indication of increasing tensions between India and China but does highlight the continued dispute over a poorly delineated border. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Since late July, Indian Army and Peoples' Liberation Army (PLA) of China have been involved in border disputes near the Dolam Plateau, the tri-junction of Sikkim (India), Bhutan and China. On July 27, the 17 Mountain Division of Indian Army, headquartered in Gangtok, Sikkim, received a letter from the Chinese troops asking for the immediate removal of two Indian Army bunkers in Batangla, Bhutan. The letter stated that failure to do so would lead to "adverse consequences." Local commanders from both sides met in a series of meetings (August 6, 15 and September 15) to resolve this issue. India asked China to soften its stance in light of the December 15 joint military exercise and argued that the fight over bunkers would go against the spirit of the joint exercise.

¶3. (SBU) In November, the PLA moved into Bhutan's Dolam Plateau and demolished a hut close to the bunkers. The hut was a rest house used by the Indian Army. Indian Army officials have kept the matter quiet as the bunkers are located in Bhutan but manned by Indian Army personnel. According to a Consulate source, the Indian Army does have a presence in Bhutan.

¶4. (SBU) Regarding the politics of the border dispute, the civilian government and the Army clearly have conflicting perspectives. The Communist Party of India- Marxist (CPM) and other Left front partners have pressured the United Progressive

Alliance (UPA), the Congress-led coalition government, to develop broader ties with Beijing. The CPM favors increased engagement with China -- military and commercial. However, the Indian Army is not enthusiastic about softening border security in order to facilitate trade with China. If the border trade does develop, the paramilitary Indo-Tibetan border police would likely replace the Army in Nathu La and surrounding areas. The Army remains opposed to this prospect. Post contacts point out that China has completed work on the 300 mile railway line from Lhasa right up to Yatung which is 20 miles from Nathu La. This gives the Chinese greater maneuverability vis-à-vis India in the border region. The Indian Army is highlighting the improved Chinese infrastructure to justify its continued presence along the border.

15. (SBU) Despite the Indian Army's concern over the border with China, military sources commented that recent media reports on Indian troop movement into the northeast had been hyped. The troop movement is not a sudden new development, they said. D. Mitra, Additional Director General of Police (Intelligence) in West Bengal returned from the region yesterday and said that Thursday's troop movement was part of an ongoing process to bring the 27th Mountain Division back to their base in northern West Bengal. The division was moved to Jammu and Kashmir following the 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament as part of India's largest military mobilization since the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War.

16. (SBU) ConGen asked Chinese Consul General Mao what he thought of the redeployment of the 6,000 Indian soldiers to the Bhutan border and he conceded he had been following develops in the media but had little additional information. He confirmed that the PLA had moved into the Dolam Plateau but said that the border was not well demarcated and that the Chinese considered

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the area to be part of China. He said that because his consulate only just opened that presently he has no direct communication link with Beijing. Mao also expressed frustration that Bhutan did not have full diplomatic relations with China.

17. (SBU) Comment: The India-China border region continues to be subject to dispute and the boundaries are not clearly delineated. Chinese presence in the Dolam Plateau is an effort to push its claim to the region and may also be an effort to pressure the Bhutanese to establish more formal diplomatic relations with China. Bhutan is more closely aligned with India and at times allows the Indian military to operate in Bhutan. As the Chinese develop their infrastructure and presence in Tibet and southwest China, China will likely increase its pressure on Bhutan to be more receptive to Chinese regional engagement. The redeployment of 6,000 troops to northern West Bengal appears to have been part of a general draw down of troops in Jammu and Kashmir but also presents an opportunity for India to signal its resolve to maintain its borders. It is unlikely that there will be any escalation of tension along the border area as both India and China want to maintain positive relations.

18. (U) This message was coordinated with AmEmbassy New Delhi.
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